

The Big Blue Egg

By Leif Marking

Jim Solberg, a news reporter, requested to come along with me on one of my monitoring trips to learn a little bit more about bluebirds, monitoring, and other birds that use our nest boxes. We started to check boxes near West Salem WI, and found and recorded five beautiful bluebird eggs in each of the first two boxes, which was very exciting for Jim.

I knew the next box had seven chickadee eggs on my last check, so when Jim inspected the nest he reported a complete hatch. The adult birds perched in a small apple tree nearby scolding us as we removed the nest so Jim could take some photos of the maggot-sized newborns. We replaced the nest, and the parents returned to the box before we left the scene.

I gathered that Jim was intrigued with this monitoring activity so I asked him to check the next box so I could stay in the vehicle and save my energy. As he returned, he reported six bluebird eggs. However one was extra large like it had a double yoke. I

quizzed him on how large. His description suggested it was too large for a bluebird egg. Then I had to go check for myself. I had already informed him that our 1 3/8 inch-wide oval entry restricted starlings, blue jays, and most cowbirds. My observation was the large blue egg was that of a starling, although the blue color was amazingly similar to the bluebird's eggs. But Jim was leery about that idea because our restricted entry size prevents them from getting in. I explained that I had removed starling eggs and nest material recently from a wood duck box on a nearby pond, and this large blue egg was identical to those I removed. So how did the starling get into the bluebird box?

Then I noticed a woodpecker, who apparently preferred round holes to oval ones, had attacked the entry hole. The hole was nearly 2 inches wide in this one-year-old cedar NABS-style house. Apparently the starling was egg bound and had to relieve herself in the nearest safe cavity. I was so thrilled to observe that the starling had not harmed the bluebird eggs. This incident exemplified to me the kindness of mother birds to other bird's reproduction.



I was concerned that a starling might return and destroy the bluebird eggs so after our monitoring trip I returned to the scene with a new substitute box. The female bluebird left the box and watched from a nearby corn stalk as I placed the nest with six eggs in the newly mounted box. As I prepared to leave with the old box in my car the female anxiously entered her new home. I took the old box home, replaced the entry panel, and returned to the scene.

Once again the female watched as I replaced the original box, placed the nest inside, removed the starling egg, and watched from a little distance as she reclaimed her home. Bluebirds are so charming when you invade their territory that one must think they comprehend that you are helping them. So how did this pair of bluebirds show their appreciation? Well, all of the eggs hatched, and all the nestlings fledged. I can share another intimate experience with bluebirds.

